

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD AT
PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 10 “THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT” ON 4 NOVEMBER 2009 AT PERDANA LEADERSHIP
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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Datuk Azman Hashim, Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Datuk Sri Professor Ibrahim Abu Shah, Dif-dif Kehormat, Puan-puan dan Tuan-tuan sekalian. I am very conscious that I am in the minority as there will be more women than men in this hall today. So, I will address the women first, Puan-puan and Tuan-tuan. I would like to thank Tan Sri Ibrahim Abu Shah for his comment on the beginning of ITM (UiTM) because the relationship is what we may call the love hate relationship. One of my experiences that I went through before I became a Minister was when I was still a Chairman of the Higher Education Council. There was a day that we had a meeting when I was warned that there would be a demonstration and they wanted to shift the meeting to some other place.

I disagreed and continued the meeting and when it ended, I was arrested by students and was put on a kangaroo court trial where they asked many questions which I answered until they didn't know what more to ask. Finally, they complained about the bad condition of the canteen furniture in ITM (UiTM). So, I said ok let's go and see and I agreed with them that the furniture was really old and needed to be replaced.

The demonstration happened in the Universiti Kebangsaan [UKM] campus but the student leader came from ITM. He was unhappy because he felt that he could not pass his English exam. What he wanted to do was to ask ITM to exempt him from this English exam because he had been busy as the student leader. That was a very good excuse.

I was very happy indeed that ITM did not exempt him and subsequently he stood against me for the election in my constituency of Kubang Pasu. However, he lost and I won. So, that was my first relationship with ITM. Of course, when I was Minister of Education, I had more problems. I had to close ITM for a short while and I couldn't really go there when it was closed. When it was opened, they held a demonstration and they performed (well) in their student activities but not academically. I must say that I've been

very harsh perhaps because some of the students including the son of my friend in my own constituency were not allowed to come back.

Of course, his father appealed to me and I apologised to him and said I would stick to the decision that I had made. You see how strict and unrelenting I was and now I am asked to talk about women and youth. The two or more are always together. It is quite difficult to discuss these two groups of people as if they are one because each one of them has different attributes. The women have certain attributes and the youth, which also includes the girls, they got different attributes.

So, in the course of my discussion, there would be a time when I would talk about women and other times I would talk only about youth, and where they have things in common. So, I will begin with taking two groups together. As far as I am concerned, they provide the numbers in a country like Malaysia, which is relatively a small country. In fact, when I became Prime Minister, the population of Malaysia back then was only 13 million.

Now, with 27 million in the country which is more than twice before the numbers of 1991, we need to make use of everyone. If you exclude the women then the figure becomes six and half million men including youth, of course we will have less a fifth of men than women. I've found that men are invariably lazy while women work hard. So, their contribution is maybe the same with the numbers of men because in any human society, you may have noticed that the numbers of men and women are about 50-50.

You may not have noticed then but I have studied population figures and I found that invariably, there may be slightly less men or slightly less women but there is never a situation where you have 20 percent women and 80 percent men. It will never happen in any place even after wars. Perhaps in those days, during the wars they kept the men. So, the women were left without prospective husbands. So, the number of women increased which is the reason why we were allowed to marry more than one.

Strictly, when the numbers of men and women are unequal, if there are lesser men and more women, therefore, you can marry more than one. If you can't be fair to

them, please marry only one as what the Quran says. I want to point up to you that if the numbers of men and women are about the same and when one man takes more than one wife to marry, there would be another man who would not be having a wife. It is a mathematical calculation.

Now, if a man takes four wives for every man who does that, there will be three men without wives. That will create social problems. See, the Quran does not ask us to take four wives. It is only for certain circumstances and it is very specific that the Quran says that you may marry two, three or four. But if we cannot be fair to them, marry only one and it goes on to say that men cannot be fair to women. So, it is quite obvious that the Quran tells us to marry only one. I'm saying this because I have one wife.

But the people who teach religion, they are very keen to have more than one wife and they will tell you that it is alright to do so. It is personal interest, really. I have diverged from the subject and I would like to go back to the question of numbers. We cannot do without the women simply because it will reduce our numbers. When we had 13 million people, if you exclude the women, then the total workforce of men will be 6.5 million and of course not all of them are able bodied, therefore only about 40 to 50 percent would be able to work. So, only 40 percent of 6.5 million would contribute to the workforce of the country. We cannot afford that.

Thus, we must bring the women in. We cannot bring the youth in because some people have passed laws that says children cannot work, we cannot employ children and all that. So, the women are very important because their capacity to contribute is actually very great. Even in male-dominant societies, the women's contribution cannot be discounted. If we look anywhere in this world, you'll find that the women work more than men. When you go to Kelantan, only the women are working. If you go to 'pasar malam' (night market) or to the market you will see only the women there. Do you see any men there?

Of course, the men are also very busy. They are busy in the coffee shop discussing politics. So, without the women, the men could not have any income at all. Of course, they think that if they marry four wives, then they can have the income of four people to support them, but eventually they will find life very difficult. So, women really

contribute a lot to human society and keeping them out means that we deny half of our strength and capacity to do work. Before this, women's contribution was only in the kitchen and other places in the house but, nowadays, we find that when chances are given to women, they have the capacity to acquire skills much faster than men. This is the impression that I get but I didn't do any studies. Of course you can see now in the universities the women outnumber the men. During my time there was only one girl to choose from but nowadays, men have so many women to choose from. And these people (women) will support them.

We see that women are really making efforts to be useful, not just in the house but also elsewhere. The men however, are not really making any effort, for example, in the Malaysia, who are the 'mat rempit'? Why is the term are called 'Mat' and not Rohana or Fatimah? We should have 'mat' and 'mah' 'rempit'. But it is not so. They are some misguided women who you know go and do all these funny things but the majority of the people who do not take life seriously and who are responsible are the men. You see in the case of drug usage, 80 percent are men but only 20 percent are women.

I can cite other cases where women contribute far more than men. Now, when they do this the men may think that they are doing well by themselves because now they have women to do their jobs. Women are now better educated than men. Many of them outnumber men and this can cause the marital problems. You have to marry below you. Not of the same status or above you but marry below you. People used to complain that their wives were uneducated. Today, the wives complain that their husbands are uneducated and it is creates social problems everywhere.

The men feel quite happy about it because they feel they are so much wanted by the women. There are so few of them who are with the same education. So they feel that way. But there will be a shift in the authority or the power wielded by the two sexes. When we allow other people to do our work they do it so well you become dependent upon them and it means you are not independent. That is happening to the men who are no longer independent.

The independent people are the women because they earn the money, have the skills and they support the family as well as the men. Well, even if he wants to work he has no capacity to work because he is not trained and he has not been given a good education. Eventually, if we allow this trend to go on, the dependence of the men will increase and the independence of the women would increase.

Eventually, women will dominate society if they haven't already. The men will lose their position or authority. If we do, it would be the women who will tell the men to please get out from this house. It is going to happen. Believe me. I am very concerned because some people think that if there are people who can do work for them, they will not bother to work. They would let other people do the work.

In the end, they will become so dependent on other people that you lose your own dependence and your own independence. Now, in the country, for example if we don't work and allow the foreigners to work, they will eventually take over this country. If you take a look at the Turks, the Uthmaniah people, they built up a great country. The Turks built up a great country because of their bravery as well as their level of education and intelligence.

So they built up the Turkish Empire which included most of the Eastern European country including Albania and Yugoslavia and others. They became so very rich and lived in luxury that they became reluctant to lose their lives. Their life was so good. They were rich, they were the rulers and they found life so good that they thought why should I fight and die? I have the money and I can employ people and make them to do the fighting for us. So, there were a lot of Christian children who were separated from their parents and were brought up as Muslims and were given education and training and they became the Janissaries or 'Yeniceries' whichever you will pronounce it.

Of course, eventually the whole armed forces were made up of these people. People of other races and not the Turks, although they learned to speak Turkish and they were brought up like the Turks but they became very powerful because they were made up of men with guns and other weapons and eventually, of course, they seized power. Albanians and other Eastern European Muslims seized Egypt from the Uthmanian Caliph.

So you can see that when you become reliant and dependent on other people eventually they would seize power from you. So, this process not only happened in Turkey but also in many places in the Arab world today. They don't want to work and because they don't work, they become dependent upon others. And eventually they are going to find difficulty because those people who provide the services would demand more authority for themselves and they eventually will seize power.

So, when men think that this is a good thing that they don't work and leave everything to women, they are gradually losing their independence, they are going to be dependent. It will not take place in my time thank God. But it will take place unless the men wake up and realise that they should share the workload together with the women. It is due to be proven that women are good as men. Certainly, in the universities they are better than the men. In business sectors also, they are better than the men. And we see so many companies now headed by women because they have the capacity. Of course men try to show that they are the masters but actually they are not, except with their wives. We never thought about this before, but women who are placed in the government service have become the heads of ministries. For example, there are a number of women who are appointed as the secretaries to the ministries and I suspect if the evaluation of the civil servant is done fairly, I think all the ministries will be headed by the women.

It is not a farfetched idea because men do not want to exert themselves anymore. They are much more keen on being more relaxed. They don't apply as much energy towards their works as they should. So, this is what we are seeing, that women besides their numbers, are becoming much better educated and have a lot more skills than men. This is going to go on and of course we cannot possibly stop them. In fact, we are too lazy to stop them.

It is so nice to have other people doing our work for ourselves. Of course, in the good old days, the women are just cooks in the kitchen. That's what they are specialised in. But if you go to the hotel, the chefs are all men, because somehow or other they think that the women could not do the cooking as well as men. But it is not true of course. The women cook better than men and this is from my own experience. But now, women are not only confined to the kitchen. They have come out of the kitchen and they have done extremely well. They have also provided intellectual input into the development of this country much more than the numbers indicate.

Women are found to be everywhere in every activity and even in the armed forces. I was very proud to tell to Arab women when they asked me about the position of women in the Malaysia that they can do anything that the men do and they have also become fighter pilots. I think that sort of shocked the Arab women that Malaysian women can become fighter pilots and they can also fight in other countries. You see that is not something that I can prove but I have seen that.

Even in our armed forces, women have reached the level of Major General. My wife is mouthing something but I can't hear. So, you can see that the contribution of the women up to this stage towards the development of this country and the management of this country is very great indeed. Of course, management and administration play big roles in development. There are more and more women who are involved in the administration up to high levels and they have proven that they can deliver.

So, the role of women in development must have increased over time. It is not something that I really like because I think the men are just as capable as the women. They have shown that they can cook as well as women in the hotel. Most of the cooks are men. Well, we need their energy and we need the energy of everyone in this country, as many people as possible because we are really short of people. We are only 27 million. You must remember that when I first became the first Prime Minister, I said that this country should have a population of 70 million and people were shocked.

People were saying that we were being told to keep down the numbers of children, family planning and all that. And here was this new Prime Minister advocating 70 million of population. What they failed to hear was that I said 70 million by the year of

2100. At the rate we were growing at that time, we would achieve 70 million by the year 2050 because we were growing at 2.3 percent or 23 children per thousand. I don't know why they go for that kind of figure but anyway we would be growing at very fast rate. And of course we would achieve 70 million very very quickly.

The idea is to slow down a bit so we can go steady reaching 70 million by the year 2100. Why do we want to slow down a bit? We need the country's wealth to grow along with this population and obviously if the population grows too fast they are going to be very poor. So, you have to work out at what rate they should grow not just because of the increase in the population but because we need their contribution as well as we need to be able to feed them and to get jobs for them.

That was why we advocated the growth of population of 70 million and some people took the opportunity by saying that now Dr. Mahathir (Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad) asked them to marry four which was stupid. It was not true at all. If you marry four people, it is the women who are going to give birth not the men. You see if a woman marries four men, the rate of production is not going to be the same, but if one man marries four women, one cannot be sure that the production rate would be as good as four men. And of course you render three men incapable by doing that so we are not contributing.

But, any excuse is a good excuse to marry four. So, when I said 70 million of population they said that now I can marry four, Dr. Mahathir (Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad) asked me to. I get blamed for everything of course. But if we have the population growth of 70 million but they are incapable of working and do not want to work, it is not good because we want the women and men also to work in this country. And we will have the population of 70 million of men and women who are contributing towards the development of this country. Obviously, the growth of this country would be much faster.

If we have only the women contributing, we would like to say thank you to them but the growth cannot be much faster. So, everything must be taken into consideration, the fact that we have men and women about the same number and that the women work hard are taken into consideration. We need a big population to have a big domestic

market, so that when we produce anything, then we can sell to the domestic market as the base and then we can export the rest to the rest of the world. Of course, if we had the men to work as hard as the women the growth of this country would be much faster.

If it is not as fast as we expected, it is because the contribution of men have become lesser. What is the contribution of the people who are drug addicts who subsequently get HIV Aids? Nothing. They are burden of the society. What is the contribution of 'mat rempit'? Nothing. So, they are not contributing anything. And yet, women are working hard and are supporting men at this present time but we should not discourage women from working. They should work and acquire even more skills, however physical work might not be too suitable for them but, intellectual work is very suitable for women because they acquire very good skills. For example I was operated on by a male surgeon, but there were female doctors also who were in charge of the anaesthetic and they performed very well. Eventually, if the men refuse to study, work and learn, the women would make up most of the specialists in the hospital. If you go to this hospital where they specialise in eyes, almost all the doctors were women.

I went with my wife one day, and I was really uncomfortable because there were so many women around me. When I was younger, I would appreciate it more but now I'm old. I don't appreciate it much but I enjoy their company because you can engage intellectual discourse with them. Men can talk about a lot of other things which are quite relevant but eventually, at the rate we are going, most of the specialists in hospitals are going to be women.

They are already taking up one whole hospital. I can't remember the name of the place but it is near Kepong. So, anyway what I'm trying to say is that women are as capable as men. Of course, if they go into wrestling, for example, I don't think it is nice. I reject the physical part of it. But use the intellectual and the skills. Women's hands are very soft and tiny and when doing work, it acquires a lot of skills. These little fingers are able to do marvellous things. So, that's the women as you can see contributing towards the development of this country.

Now, what about the youth? Yes, when we talk about the youth, of course we include the girls as well, not just the boys. Youth demands that they be heard and that

they are given authority even. However, if the youth do not include the women, most of them are good in demanding but not so good in implementing. I have respect for modern youth because they are very intelligent, they are certainly far better educated than the youth during my time but still they need to be a little bit patient. Because we can demand one thing but doing is another matter. Although if they insist, the adult age would be lower and lower. We have to admit that experience count in life for a person. Experience counts (because) if you have a lot of experience then you are much more capable and simply because of limitation in time because you are still young. Your experience is not enough and therefore you should confine yourself to providing yourself with qualifications.

Youth should try to acquire as much knowledge and skills as much as possible. Now if they do that, they will still not be qualified to wield power but they can contribute ideas. There is no doubt that there are many youth who are very intelligent but to say that they are better than older people, I find it difficult to agree. I was a youth at one time, a bit difficult to remember now because it has been such a long time ago. Well, while I had the ideas and all that to do things which older people did not do, I realised that I did not have sufficient skills nor was I accepted as a credible leader which was why I decided that I need to be credible in order to have people listen to me. I first had to acquire an education at the university level. I wanted to be a lawyer because I like to argue with people. Unfortunately, in those days whatever scholarships that you got you took it and I was given a scholarship to study medicine. It was not what I wanted but still it serves the purpose of making me a much more credible person in the eyes of the community.

So, youth must spend their time giving themselves the credentials. They must acquire more knowledge and skills and of course at the sidelines, they can give their opinions and things like that. But to presume that youth know better than older people, I don't think there is a basis for it. So, the role of youth whether they are men, boys or girls are to acquire as much knowledge and skills as possible. The girls are doing that but the boys are not. The male youth in this country dominates the leadership but their ability is not comparable with the girls because they make no effort to acquire knowledge to acquire skills. It is obvious because if we go to any university in Malaysia, you will see

the number of boys is lesser than the girls. In other words, the boys are not preparing themselves for their roles when they become older. They are very impatient because they want to do everything but they have no experience and not enough knowledge because they make no effort to acquire knowledge. I'm not saying all of them are like that but the majority of them are not really intellectuals who are capable of leading. They can lead the youth but not the society.

So, that is fine. Leading the youth would be a kind of training period for you when you get older. But you have also to spend more time to acquire knowledge and skills. I was very impatient when I was the Minister of Education. Some people led by one person whom I shall not name got the university students to demonstrate. It seemed that somebody in Baling died of starvation. So, they demonstrated against the government for allowing a man or boy to die in starvation. But that was an immature kind of thing, when you demonstrate, you cannot do very much. On the other hand, when you are demonstrating, I doubt that you are studying.

I did not see them carrying out their books and pens while they were demonstrating. Yes, they used their hands a lot but nothing more beyond that. So, they were wasting time, not studying and spent their time demonstrating. This is especially bad when you find that these students had been given an opportunity to acquire university education through other people's money, from the government. One must remember that the government is handling the people's money.

It is not the government's money although sometimes the government does print money. But we were not doing that at that time. The government collected money from the people through taxes and must spend the money wisely realising that we needed skilful manpower. We raised the education facilities in this country. In my time there was no university in Malaysia, and in the whole of Malaysia and Singapore.

When I went to Singapore to study medicine, I found that the number of students there was very small, just 77. Out of 77, 7 were Malays, one girl and 6 boys, one tenth of the student' population. Obviously we need to create more opportunities for other youths to get their education. Malaysia is one of the countries that spends almost a quarter of the allocation of funds for development on education. The first thing we did was to set up

a university, and then set up the second and third universities, and lastly we set up colleges.

We wanted our youth to be trained to have the skill and the knowledge that would make them capable of contributing towards the development of the country. We were willing to spend money on them. But think of the waste to money when instead of studying and equipping themselves with better knowledge, they spend their time demonstrating. Of course they didn't do well. Like Encik Arshad who was the leader of ITM students. His excuse for not being able to pass his English test was because he was busy with the Student Union.

We didn't send students to university to do union work. If you want to do that you can hire somebody else. We had spent a lot of money on students to give them an education and qualification that would enable them to contribute towards the development of this country. Instead of doing that, they had demonstration and got involved in politics etc. That was wasting public money which we couldn't afford because we can use the money for something else like building a road in the kampong for example.

But we found that they wasted money by demonstrating against the government. Nobody died in Baling because of starvation. Our society did not allow anybody in the village to starve. If we have anything at all to eat, we'll share with someone who is starving. He won't die. To say that a young boy would die of starvation in the kampung is an obscenity. In the Malay kampung, we care about our neighbours. If you find your neighbour starving, whatever little food that we have we will share with them.

When we investigated, (we found) the boy was living in a home which was stocked with a lot of food. He was not dying of starvation. In fact, it was doubtful whether he died or not but it was a nice issue to think up by our good friend who is now trying to become the Prime Minister of Malaysia. He told the students, look, this government was bad and allowed people to starve to death. He has a way of convincing fellow students that what he said was true.

They (the students) spent their time demonstrating and that showed a lack of responsibility. You were given money to do something to improve your chances in the future but you wasted that by demonstrating and you don't require intelligence to demonstrate. We want you to study. So lack of responsibility is quite often found among youth. I can say this because I'm no longer in the government. But the government of course, is careful not to say this because you shouldn't antagonise the youth because they can campaign for the opposition, for example.

But I would like to say this based on my observation, when you are studying you must study and study very hard. Even if you have a brilliant brain, if it is not used, it doesn't give you knowledge. You have to learn to acquire knowledge; you have to study to acquire knowledge. Knowledge doesn't come to you just like that even if you are brilliant. I believe most of them (the youth) are quite brilliant if they spend their time studying. But I find that they do not like to study. But the place (in university) must be reserved for them. Don't anybody take place. Now, it is not fair that in a multiracial country that we should reserve places for these people, these young men who are busy playing. So, you come back, study sometimes when you feel like it but the place must be kept empty. That is why we introduced that they must qualify and have certain merits before they can be admitted into university. I mean, I'm a Malay nationalist to the core but even I cannot keep defending the empty places for Malay students and denying the non-Malays a place in university while the Malay students are still playing.

That is not right. That is the impression that I get, that they are irresponsible and they want the place to be kept and reserved for them. They are not going use the reserved places and yet they do not like to see other people use all the places. So, we have wasted the place. This is wrong. So, this sense of responsibility among the youth less is among the girls. The girls are much more responsible. You cannot give that excuse, that 'Sorry, I'm busy tonight with 'mat rempit' in this 'jalan' and that,' but you cannot take my place while I'm busy with my motorcycle.

You are not paid to do stunts on motorcycles. If I have my way... I know there is a woman who was bad and drank alcohol and is to be whipped, but I would like to whip some of these 'mat rempit' honestly. I would like to whip them good and proper. If I ask them, you have a job to develop the country and what are you doing? You are riding

motorcycles. Is that your contribution to society for development? Have you forgotten that you have this opportunity to own that motorcycle simply because other people developed this country so that your father can earn enough income to buy you a motorcycle? You owe the government and you owe the society. This sense of responsibility is still not there among many of our youth. Of course you can talk a lot about the contribution that you make and intelligence that you have but in reality your contribution is much less. So, between the men, the women and the youth I think the women even when they are young, when they are girls, are quite capable of contributing much more to development than the boys because boys have no sense of responsibility.

Of course we should blame the parents also. I saw a show on RTM called 'Kenali Anak Kita' where the parents did not really bring up their children properly. That is something we must blame the parents for also. But today, most parents, both would be working and the children are left to themselves. So, they don't get to grow up with the right values in order to become responsible citizens who would like to make sacrifices in order to develop the country.

You know even asking you to make sacrifices; we are giving you good money to have an education to acquire skills so that you can work for yourself earn the money to support yourself. In doing so, you would be contributing towards the development of this country. So, between the youth and the women I would deal with the women separately because they are mature and they contribute much more.

I think the men are not contributing enough and they should become more responsible but the youth are still not yet at the stage where they know how to be responsible. They are wasting public money by not making use of facilities provided by the people for them to gain an education and to contribute towards the development of the nation. That in brief is my view of the two subjects. I suppose now I'm going to be asked questions.

